



STATE
SENATOR
Wayne Kuipers
30TH SENATE DISTRICT E-MAIL UPDATE



Kuipers Reintroduces Retired Lawmakers' Health Care Benefits Reforms

Legislation was recently reintroduced in the Michigan Senate to change the health care system for future elected officials to a graded system similar to that of new school employees.

The two bills would require new lawmakers to gradually earn their retirement health care benefits. The reforms are identical to ones introduced and previously passed by the Senate.

A legislator will have to serve at least four years to enter the system and would only be eligible for 30 percent coverage. The bill would result in significant savings to the state and remind Michigan residents of shared sacrifice in difficult times.

Senate Bill 133 creates a graduated health care system for new legislators. A lawmaker would receive 30 percent coverage at the end of four years of service with six percent being added to each year of additional service. The coverage maximizes at 90 percent after 14 years of service. After turning 55, they would be eligible for retirement health care coverage, which becomes supplemental coverage when the individual is 65.

A companion bill, SB 132, applies the same graded health care system as SB 133 to new judges and appointed or elected officials. Officeholders subject to this reform include the governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, and the legislative auditor general.

The two bills have been referred to the Senate Committee on Government Operations and Reform.

Senate Moves to Invest Funds in Michigan's Agriculture Industry

The Michigan Senate recently approved legislation that will help make \$5 million available for value-added agriculture grants.

When the 21st Century Jobs package was approved in 2005, it included \$10 million for value-added agriculture. Legislation was passed in 2006 for the first \$5 million to be allocated, but the remaining money has yet to be spent. Senate Bill 134 would authorize spending the next \$5 million.

Senate Republicans want the remaining money to be used for its intended purpose of testing and creating markets for agricultural products. This could help develop more jobs for state residents in the future.

A study by Michigan State University's Product Center found that the agriculture industry in Michigan grew by 12 percent in 2007. Agriculture had an economic impact of \$63.7 billion in 2006 and increased to \$71.3 billion in 2007.

According to the Michigan Department of Agriculture, the agri-food industry in Michigan employs one million residents, nearly 25 percent of people working in the state. The bill has been sent to the House for consideration.